

Purpose

To convince Philemon to forgive his slave and to accept him as a brother in the faith

Author

Paul

To Whom Written

Philemon, who was probably a wealthy member of the Colossian church

Date Written

During Paul's imprisonment in Rome (60 AD)

Setting

Slavery was common in the Roman Empire, and, evidently, some Christians had slaves (or servants). Paul makes a radical statement by calling this slave Philemon's brother in Christ.

Key People

Philemon and Onesimus

Key Verses

"Perhaps you could think of it this way — Onesimus ran away for a little while so you could have him back forever. He is no longer just a slave; he is a beloved brother, especially to me..."

Philemon 1:15, 16

An Overview (1 Chapter)

- Paul's Appreciation of Philemon (1:1-7)
- Paul's Appeal for Onesimus (1:8-25)

Major Themes

- *Forgiveness:* Philemon was Paul's friend and the legal owner of a slave named Onesimus. Paul asked him not to punish Onesimus but to forgive and restore him as a new Christian brother.
- *Barriers:* Slavery was widespread in the Roman Empire, but no one is lost to God or beyond His love. Slavery was a barrier between people, but Christian love and fellowship are to overcome such barriers. In Christ we are one family.
- *Respect:* Paul was a friend of both Philemon and Onesimus. He had the authority as an apostle to tell Philemon what to do. Yet Paul chose to appeal to his friend in Christian love rather than to order him what to do.